

Sound Thoughts, Words and Music

Dr. Stace Constantinou



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Title

Sound Thoughts, Words and Music (2016) is a curated six-hour radio programme made for Resonance Extra, as part of their Artist-In-Residence programme. This practice-led research involved interviewing fourteen active practitioners of sonic materials (composers, performers, writers, producers, poets, radio programme makers and thinkers). A number of concepts about sound as music, and language run throughout as tests against what the practitioners themselves think and say. As well as the interview material, the programme includes music, sonic art, sound art, radio montage and poetry made by the artists themselves.

Submission Details

Researcher	Dr. Stace Constantinou
Collaborators	None
Title	Sound Thoughts, Words and Music
Output Type	Other
Output Component(s)	Curated radio broadcast
Dates	2016
Dissemination	Radio programme
ORCID	https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8053-4699
DOI	https://doi.org/10.24339/rm95-a053

Additional Information

Sound Thoughts, Words and Music is a curated body of sonic works presented as a six-hour radio programme for Resonance Extra, Artist-In-Residence Scheme. The programme was first broadcast on 6 March 2016 and reached 16th in the Global Interview Chart.

The aim of the broadcast was to investigate to what extent sound can be considered to be music. Fourteen sonic practitioners (composers, performers, writers, producers, poets, radio programme makers and thinkers) were selected to take part in the project. The researcher interviewed each contributor asking a series of questions, relating both to the overall theme of the programme, as well as specific to their own individual work. In addition, their sonic works were included as part of the broadcast.

Constantinou curated the event and edited the materials for broadcast quality and premiered a new piece entitled “Silent Counterpoint” as part of the broadcast

Research Aims

To curate a contemporary discussion on the extent to which sound can be considered to be music.

Objectives

- * To design and edit a six-hour radio programme (with radiophonic elements) that features the sonic works and a parallax of face-to-face as well as online interviews
- * To use a formal structure to coherently shape the six hours of sound content.

Research Methods

A narrative inquiry and qualitative research using firstly generalised questions, then secondly questions focussed on the individual practitioners and their selected works; for example questions for Dr. Julie Wilson-Bokowie (writer and performer), include; is it possible for pure sound to be music? And, how and why should sonic-materials be treated differently to non-sound materials? And to Dr. Michael Rosas Cobian (composer), what's the relationship, or commonality (if any) between electroacoustic music and instrumental music? And, is silence a structural element of music?

The broadcast utilised recorded interviews, both face-to-face as well as online, audio editing, and audio manipulation techniques (audio glitches are often left deliberately as a part of the audio texture).

The use of radiophonic, audio editing and manipulation techniques that blur the boundaries of the realism (of the interviews) and the (unrealism) of the speculations explored as a result of the specific questions;

The six hours of content is framed using a formal structure, realised through the use of creative mathematic patterning proportions.

Research Context

Two concepts in the field of sound as music seem to persist today. Firstly, sound as music was most notably theorised by the French acoustician Pierre Schaeffer in his work 'Treatise on Musical Objects' that a special sort of listening needs to take place – a type of scientific listening place that frees sound from its causal relations (Schaeffer, P., trans North, C., and Dack, J., 2012, p.101.) It has been argued that Schaeffer's ideas have found their way into the common psyche of contemporary electronic music composers, sound artists, sonic artists, and sound poets for example (Kane, B., 2014, p. 4).

The second is the polemical notion put forward by John Cage that anything can be considered music (Cage 2000, p. 276) as artists create the music and/ or the sound through their subjective inner experience.

Taken together these two juxtaposed notions opens up a space for exploring what can and what cannot be considered sound, music and thoughts. This research explores to what extent these ideas can be tested against the experience, thoughts and work of fourteen practitioners in the field.

The wider contextual elements include a simple philosophical question, combined with the counterpoint of the fourteen practitioners works, and ideas about what, how and why they do what they do. A simple question starts the programme: If a tree falls in a forest and there's no one there to hear it, does it make a sound?

The programme theme is a curated documentary, exploring whether or not sound can be considered music. The research took place via an Artist in Residence initiative at the radio station Resonance FM, a pioneering 24/7 radio channel dedicated to global music, sound art and radio art. Sound Thoughts, Words and Music was made as part of the launch of Resonance Extra, a part of Resonance FM.

Insights

1. The differences between music, singing, electronic sounds and speech is not as distinct as it may seem (Brown, S., et al, 1999, p. 8).
2. A repeated section of audio (an audio object) of a short spoken word phrase, transforms in the listener's perception into music. And even when the full sentence is reinstated the perception picks up the newly transformed musical perception.

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Appendix 1

Section timings that structure the 6 hour programme:

6pm	Overture.
6:37pm	Exposition.
7:09pm	Second Subject.
7:43pm	Poetry, Techno & Saga.
8:16pm	Tango.
8:50pm	A Sequence of Interviews.
9:11pm	World Premiere "Silent Counterpoint".
9:32pm	Sisters.
10:03pm	The Two Professors.
10:25pm	Telyn.
11:20pm	Recapitulations.
11:42pm	Finale (& end notes).

Appendix 2

List of Contributors:

Dr. Bokowiec, Mark (composer)
 Dr. Constantinou, Stace (composer and producer)
 Davies, Angharad (violinist, improviser and composer)
 Davies, Rhodri (harpist, improviser and composer)
 Dee, Manni (music producer and DJ)
 Prof. Emmerson, Simon (academic and composer)
 Firnberg, Virginia (composer and poet)
 Prof. Hendy, David (academic, writer and broadcaster)
 Dr. Manning, OBE Jane (soprano and writer)
 Dr. Marrington, Mark (academic and composer)
 Dr. Rosas-Cobian, Michael (composer)
 Sr. Stones, Alan (sound designer and composer)
 Thompson, Matt (radio producer and sound recordist)
 Dr. Wilson-Bokowiec, Julie (writer and performer).

Appendix 3

Programme Content (by artist alphabetical order)

Bokowiec, Mark (composer)

- * Etch (voice: Julie Wilson-Bokowiec)
- * V'Oct(ritual) (voice: Julie Wilson-Bokowiec)

Constantinou, Stace (composer and producer)

- * On Sensations of Cactus, preludes 1 to 6 (pianist: Kate Ryder)
- * Small Stars, from From The Book Of Songs (soprano: Jane Manning)

Davies, Angharad (violinist, improviser and composer)

- * Circular Bowing Study
- * Balancing Spring On Strings 1, 2 and 3

Davies, Rhodri (harpist, improviser and composer)

- * crosis
- * undur
- * trem (percussion and tape)
- * beres
- * plosif
- * berant
- * atam

Dee, Manni (music producer and DJ)

- * Man Is Free, Man Is Freedom
- * Repeating Rituals

Emmerson, Simon (academic and composer)

- * Time Past IV (soprano: Jane Manning)
- * Time-Space (baroque flute: Eleanor Dawson. Harpsichord: Jane Chapman. Live Electronics: Simon Emmerson)

Firnberg, Virginia (composer and poet)

- * IT'S BRIGHT THE SKY
- * PROSCENIUMARCH-MOUTH
- * Stone Sea

Hendy, David (academic, writer and broadcaster)

- * Talking Drum (recorded and produced by Matt Thompson)
- * Vezelay Abbey (recorded and produced by Matt Thompson)

Manning, OBE Jane (soprano and writer)

- * "Act I" from King Harald's Saga (composer: Judith Weir)
- * "Mondestrunken" from Pierrot Lunaire performed by Jane's Minstrels (composer: Arnold Schoenberg)
- * "Small Stars" from From The Book Of Songs (composer: Stace Constantinou)
- * Time Past IV (composer: Simon Emmerson)

Marrington, Mark (academic and composer)

- * Cars
- * Not the Olympics

Rosas-Cobian, Michael (composer)

- * Cantaor
- * Soliliqueando (cello: Judith Mitchell)
- * Urbis #2 (bass clarinet: Hein Pijnenburg)
- * Urbis #3 (electric guitar: Tim Brady)
- * Urbis #4 (first run)

Stones, Alan (sound designer and composer)

- * FB 1
- * FB 2
- * FB 3

Thompson, Matt (radio producer and sound recordist)

- * Talking Drum (with Nana Kyeremateng Bafour)
- * Vezelay Abbey (with Iegor Reznikoff)

Wilson-Bokowiec, Julie (writer and performer)

- * V'Oct(ritual) (composer: Mark Bokowiec)

Appendix 4a

Questions for Dr. Julie Wilson-Bokowiec:

1. Is it possible for pure sound to be music?
2. How and why should sonic-materials be treated differently to non-sound materials?
3. What's different about working with sound/ music as opposed to say writing?
4. Are there Sound/ Sonic Art, Electroacoustic, clichés? If so, what are they?
5. What's the relationship between sound/ music and your practice as an artist?
6. Is silence a structural element of music?
7. Is writing really just composing music in words?
8. Is silence best described as sound with something removed, or as the absence of any sound?
9. Is there something inherently mystical about sound/ music?
10. In relation to your practice: is there anything you'd like to say about sonic-art/ electroacoustic music that you feel is important but is often overlooked?

Appendix 4b

Questions for Dr. Michael Rosas Cobian:

1. Is it possible for pure sound to be music?
2. How and why should sonic-materials be treated differently to non-sound materials? (this is a question about music-objects and sound-objects).
3. What's different about working with sonic-art, as opposed to say with instruments: woodwind, brass, strings and percussion?
4. Where does ones imagination stop and the music start?
5. Do you use extra-musical elements in the realisation of your music?
6. What's the relationship, or commonality (if any) between electroacoustic music and instrumental music?
7. Is silence a structural element of music?
8. Can electroacoustic music ever be spontaneous?
9. Have the sounds of the Americas imbued themselves in your music – if yes, would you share some thoughts on this?
10. Is there something inherently mystical about music (electroacoustic music)?
11. Is there anything you'd like to say about electroacoustic music that you feel is important but is often overlooked?

COLOPHON

Project Editor	Andrew Hewitt
Proofreaders	Andrew Hewitt, Mel Jordan
Graphic Design	James Smith
Publisher	The University of Northampton
DOI	10.24339/rm95-a053



